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GI Losses For Week Set Record

From News Dispatches

SAIGON, Feb. 22 — A record 543 Americans were killed in action in Vietnam last week, the U.S. Command announced Thursday. The total was 127 higher than the previous record, and it brought to 1359 the number of American deaths in the Communist offensive of the last three weeks.

For the second week, no figures on enemy casualties were released. A South Vietnamese government spokesman said 37,515 Communists had been killed since the offensive began officially Jan. 29.

In the war today these actions were reported:

• U.S. Marines reached the southeastern corner of the Citadel of Hue in the 23d day of battle through the streets of the old imperial capital 400 miles north of Saigon. But the enemy still held most of the territory along the Citadel's southern wall, and more hard fighting lay ahead.

• U.S. sources revealed that two enemy divisions were positioned just north of Saigon and another division was within clicking distance to the west. These unts reportedly are equipped with new-model, easily maneuverable Chinese rockets.

• Marine officers at the beleaguered combat base of Khesanh said the enemy had encircled the garrison so tightly that the defenders could neither reinforce nor withdraw from Kheshanh without heavy casualties.

• For the first time in the war, U.S. planes bombed the Hanoi Radio station 3½ miles from the North Vietnamese capital. Because of bad weather, there was no assessment of damage in the Wednesday raid, but Hanoi Radio was still broadcasting. The North Vietnamese are thought to have more than one transmitter site, so even if the Hanoi area station were knocked out the Radio would still beam out its message. A military storage area 41 miles southwest of Hanoi also was struck for the first time.

• Sources in Saigon said at least nine more people have been arrested in the government's political crackdown.

Last week's American toll of 543 came after figures the previous two weeks of 400 and 416. Thus the U.S. Command listed 1359 Americans killed in action for three weeks, since Jan. 28. However, a South Vietnamese government spokesman said 1522 Americans had died in the offensive.

By U.S. count, an average of 320 Americans a week have been killed this year, double the average of last year. In 1966 the average was 96 and the year before 26.

In the three-year Korean war, the weekly death toll averaged 210, and in the five-year World War II an average of 1108 Americans were killed every week. The death toll for Vietnam now stands at 18,239, compared with 33,629 for Korea and 291,557 for World War II.